

MANDARIN

SPAWN



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MFARLANE

165



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TODD MCFARLANE AND
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STORY
DAVID HINE

PENCILS
LAN MEDINA

INKS
EDGAR TADEO

LETTERING
TOM ORZECOWSKI

COLOR
ANDY TROY
MATT MILLA
BRIAN HABERLIN

PRODUCTION
JAY FOTOS
FRANCIS TAKENAGA

COVER
GREG CAPULLO

MANAGING EDITORS
JENNIFER CASSIDY
TYLER JEFFERS

SPAWN EDITORS
BRIAN HABERLIN
TODD MCFARLANE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OF SPAWN.COM
TYLER JEFFERS

MANAGER OF
INT'L. PUBLISHING
FOR TMP
SUZY THOMAS

PUBLISHER FOR
IMAGE COMICS
ERIC STEPHENSON

SPAWN CREATED BY
TODD MCFARLANE

DEDICATED TO
GREG CAPULLO

A NOTE TO THE READER:

This tale fits outside our normal series continuity. But, we figure everyone could use a breather from the drama of our last few issues. So, please view this as it is intended, as a view into the life of another Spawn from another place and time. Next month AI will be with us again... our hero who could save the world but not himself.



TODD MCFARLANE
PRODUCTIONS
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IN THE FINAL YEARS OF THE SOUTHERN SUNG DYNASTY, BEFORE KUBLAI KHAN'S MONGOL ARMY CONQUERED CHINA, A MAN NAMED ZHENG LI WAS MADE GOVERNOR OF A SUB-PREFECTURE IN SHANSI PROVINCE.

ZHENG LI HAD FALLEN FROM FAVOR AT THE EMPEROR'S COURT. IT WAS A SIGN OF HIS DISGRACE THAT HE HAD BEEN DISPATCHED TO THIS MISERABLE REGION.

FEARING RAIDS FROM THE NEIGHBORING MONGOLS, ZHENG LI SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH THE BEST WARRIORS HE COULD FIND. TO FINANCE HIS PRIVATE ARMY HE TAXED THE LOCAL PEASANTS MERCILESSLY.

ONE EVENING IN LATE SUMMER, A PARTY OF HIS TAX GATHERERS RETURNED TO THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE WITH AN UNUSUAL BOOTY.





THE PEOPLE OF MIHSI ARE LIARS AND LAYABOUTS. IF THEY HAVE NO FOOD PERHAPS WE SHOULD SPARE THEM THE TRIALS OF THE COMING WINTER BY SLAUGHTERING THEM ALL LIKE DOGS.

WHAT IS THIS? WHAT HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME?

SIR, THE VILLAGE OF MIHSI HAS NO TRIBUTE. THEIR RICE CROPS HAVE FAILED AND THEY ARE STARVING.

IN PLACE OF TRIBUTE THEY HAVE SENT A MONSTER FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT.



THE CREATURE WAS BORN IN THE VILLAGE TWENTY-TWO YEARS AGO UNDER A BLOOD-RED MOON. THE MOTHER CLAIMS IT WAS Sired BY A DEMON.

A DEMON! WHAT KIND OF A FOOL DO THEY TAKE ME FOR?

OPEN IT UP! LET'S SEE WHAT DROOLING IDIOT THOSE INBRED WRETCHES HAVE SPAWNED.



BY ALL THE GODS OF HIGHEST HEAVEN!





I THINK THE VILLAGERS MAY BE RIGHT, FATHER.

THAT OBSCENITY HAD AT LEAST ONE DEMON PARENT.

THE MONSTER CAN'T SPEAK. THE VILLAGERS SAY IT'S IMMUNE TO INJURY AND PAIN.

GIVE ME YOUR SWORD.



IMMUNE TO PAIN IS IT?





IT APPEARS YOUR VILLAGERS WERE TELLING THE TRUTH.

LET ME TRY, FATHER.



SOMETHING TO IMPROVE THE POOR FOOL'S LOOKS.



IT'S A HAIR PIN. PRETTY ISN'T IT?



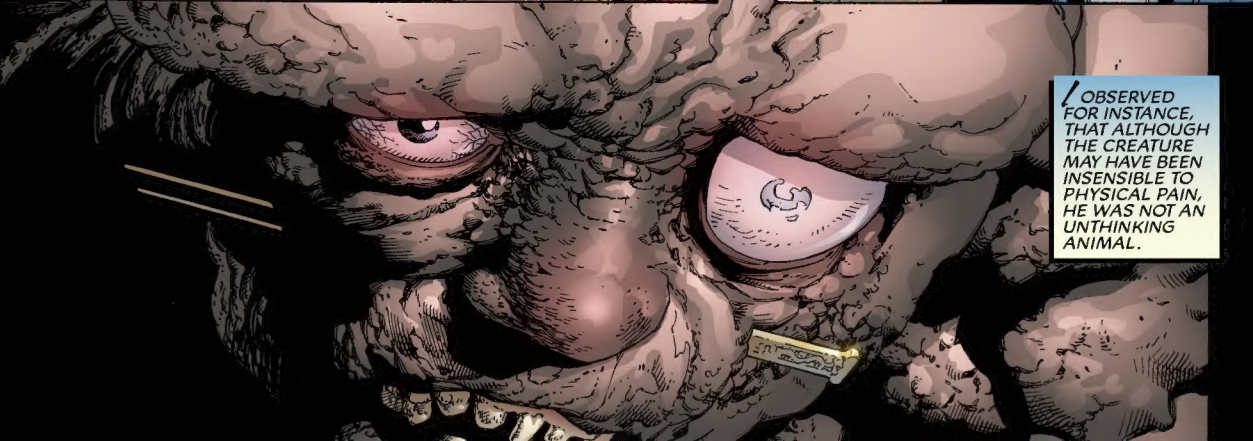
THERE! MY GIFT TO YOU.



HA HA! I THINK HE LIKES IT.

MY NAME IS YUAN HENG. IN THOSE DAYS I WAS THE GOVERNOR'S STORY-TELLER, ENTERTAINING THE HOUSEHOLD WITH TALES FROM BYGONE TIMES.

THIS STORY IS MY OWN, ALTHOUGH MY ROLE IN IT IS LARGELY AS AN OBSERVER.



I OBSERVED FOR INSTANCE, THAT ALTHOUGH THE CREATURE MAY HAVE BEEN INSENSIBLE TO PHYSICAL PAIN, HE WAS NOT AN UNTHINKING ANIMAL.

OVER THE FOLLOWING MONTHS MY TALENTS AS STORYTELLER WERE RARELY CALLED UPON. THE CREATURE HAD TAKEN MY PLACE AS A SOURCE OF AMUSEMENT.

THE GOVERNOR WOULD CHALLENGE VISITORS TO CREATE NEW AND MORE ELABORATE TORTURES.

BUT NO ONE COULD EVER OUTDO SHIHONG'S APPETITE FOR CRUELTY.

I WONDER, WERE THE PEOPLE OF YOUR VILLAGE EVER TEMPTED TO FEAST ON YOU?

PWAAH!

IT SMELLS LIKE ROTTED PIG.

THIS MEAT IS ONLY FIT FOR A DOG!

HOLD HIS ARM.





I TOOK PITY ON THE SO-CALLED MONSTER AND DID WHAT I COULD TO COMFORT HIM.



I'VE BROUGHT AN OINTMENT FOR YOUR WOUNDS. IT CONTAINS TEASEL ROOT. IT WILL HELP TO HEAL YOU.



I NOTICED A PATCH OF NORMAL FLESH ON HIS CHEST, DIRECTLY ABOVE HIS HEART.



THE SKIN WAS SOFT AND WHITE, AS DELICATE AS A BABY'S.



AS I TENDED HIM, I RECOUNTED THE TALE OF THE WARRIOR LI CHING.

...WHEN LI CHING RETURNED HE FOUND THE DRAGON'S MOTHER DISTRAUGHT.

"I TOLD YOU TO USE ONLY ONE DROP FROM THE MAGIC VASE TO GIVE THE VILLAGE THE RAIN IT NEEDED. YET YOU USED TWENTY."



HE LISTENED AS ATTENTIVELY AS A CHILD.

LI CHING REPLIED THAT THE VILLAGERS HAD BEEN GOOD TO HIM. ONE DROP SEEMED TOO LITTLE TO REPAY THEIR KINDNESS.

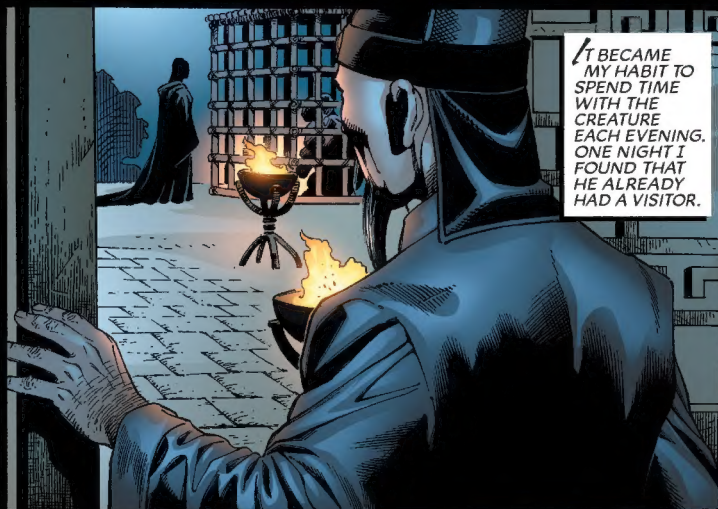


"YOU FOOL!" CRIED THE WOMAN, "EACH DROP FROM HEAVEN REPRESENTS ONE FOOT OF WATER ON EARTH. YOU HAVE CAUSED A GREAT FLOOD."

"THE VILLAGE IS DESTROYED!"



AS I FINISHED MY STORY, I BELIEVE HE SMILED.



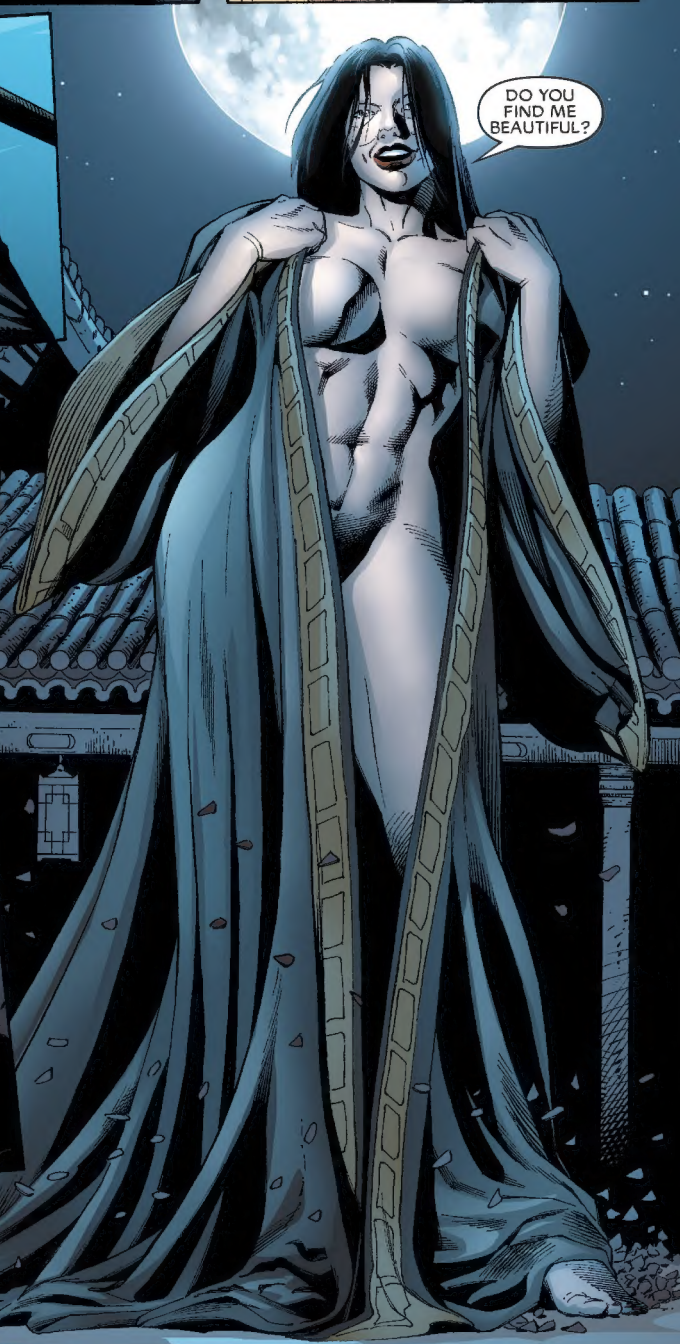
IT BECAME
MY HABIT TO
SPEND TIME
WITH THE
CREATURE
EACH EVENING.
ONE NIGHT I
FOUND THAT
HE ALREADY
HAD A VISITOR.



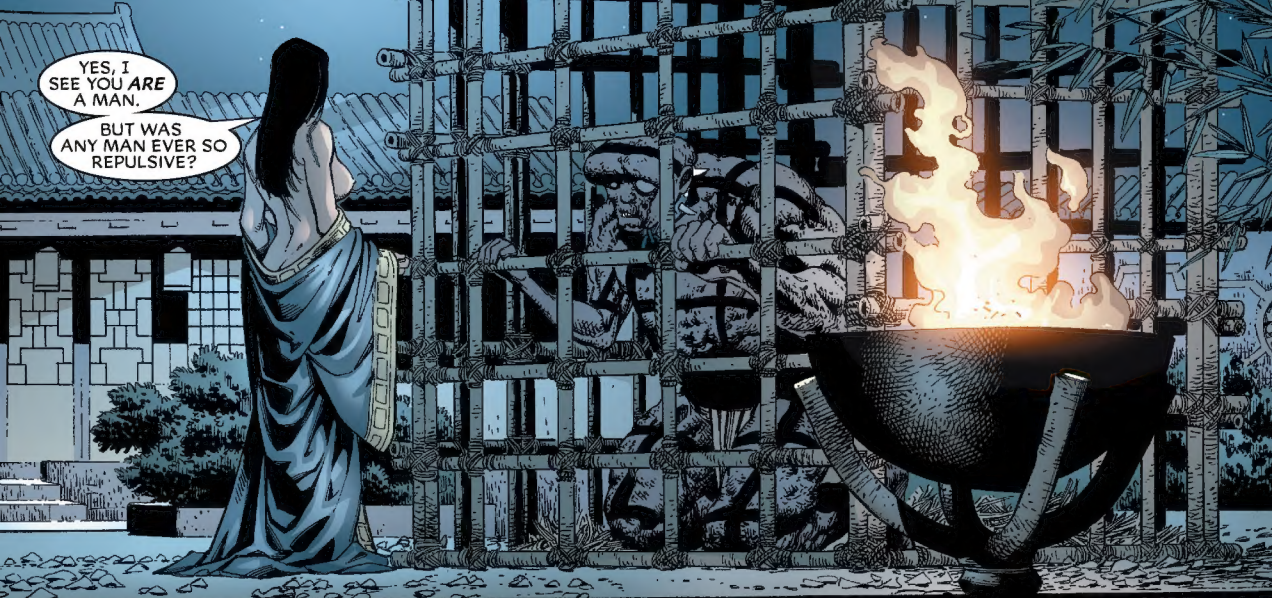
THE
STORYTELLER
SAYS YOU ARE
NOT A
MONSTER.



HE
BELIEVES
YOU HAVE
THE
FEELINGS
AND
INSTINCTS
OF A
MAN.



DO YOU
FIND ME
BEAUTIFUL?



YES, I
SEE YOU ARE
A MAN.

BUT WAS
ANY MAN EVER SO
REPULSIVE?



POOR
THING.

YOU
WILL NEVER
KNOW A
WOMAN'S
LOVE.



WILL YOU
PLEASURE
YOURSELF WITH
THOSE FILTHY
HANDS?



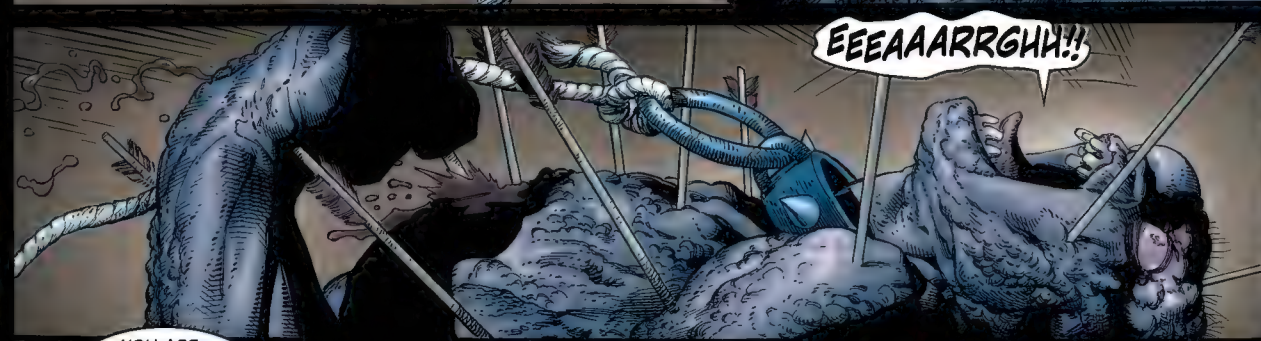
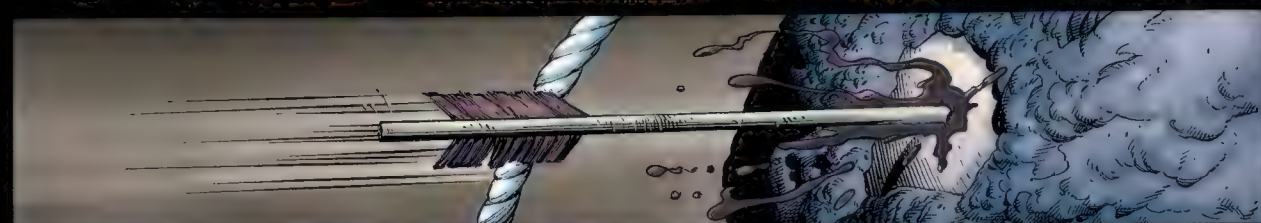
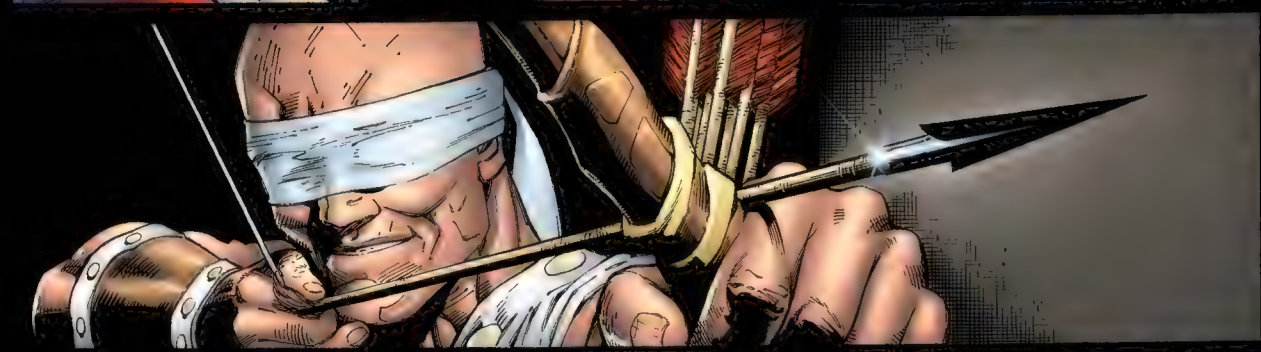
THINK OF
ME IN YOUR
DREAMS,
MONSTER.



HER LAUGHTER
PIERCED THE
NIGHT AIR LIKE
SPLINTERED GLASS.

I KNEW THEN, THAT
THERE WERE NO LIMITS
TO SHIHONG'S CRUELTY
AND I PRAYED THAT THE
GODS WOULD BRING
DOWN A JUST PUNISHMENT
ON HER PERFECT HEAD.





THE CREATURE WAS CARRIED TO HIS CAGE WHERE I DID MY BEST TO RELIEVE HIS PAIN. I COULD SEE FROM HIS EYES THAT HE KNEW HE WAS DYING.

YOU ARE GOING TO A BETTER WORLD THAN THIS, MY POOR FRIEND.

LET US HOPE SO.

WHO ARE YOU?

I HAVE BEEN SENT BY LORD MALEBOLGIA.

HIS KINGDOM IS A LONG WAY FROM HERE.

LEAVE US, STORY-TELLER. IT'S YOUR 'FRIEND' I HAVE COME TO SEE.

THE STRANGER'S WORDS SENT AN INEXPLICABLE CHILL THROUGH MY VEINS.

I KNOW YOUR DREAMS, CHENGLEI. I CAN MAKE THEM REAL.

HOW COULD HE KNOW THE CREATURE'S NAME?

WHO IS THAT MAN? WHERE DID HE COME FROM?

WHAT MAN?

THE STRANGER WAS GONE AND THE CREATURE, CHENGLEI, WAS AT PEACE.

EVEN IN DEATH
CHENGLEI'S
BODY DID NOT
ESCAPE ABUSE.
THE GOVERNOR
EXHIBITED HIS
ROTTING
CARCASS IN A
CAGE OUTSIDE
HIS PALACE.

HERE IT
HUNG
AS THE
SEASONS
PASSED.

ONE DAY, WHEN THE WINTER
SNOW HAD SETTLED ACROSS
THE LAND, A LONE RIDER
APPROACHED THE PALACE.

I WOULD
SPEAK TO
YOUR MASTER,
ZHENG LI.

I'M TOLD
YOU ARE IN
NEED OF
WARRIORS.

IT TAKES
MORE THAN AN
OUTLANDISH MASK
AND COSTUME TO
MAKE A WARRIOR.
YOU WOULD DO
BETTER TO SEEK
EMPLOYMENT AS
AN ACTOR.

BRING OUT YOUR BEST
FIGHTER. I'LL PAINT THE SNOW
WITH HIS BLOOD.

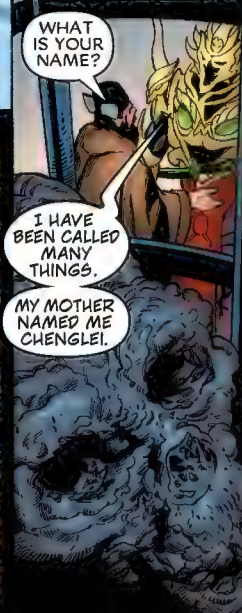
HA!
YOU'RE A
FOOL, BUT
A BRAVE
ONE.

SUMMON
YANG SHIH!



THE STRANGER SAID SOMETHING TO YANG. NO ONE WAS CLOSE ENOUGH TO HEAR BUT YANG HIMSELF. THE WORDS HAD A DEVASTATING EFFECT ON HIM.







PERHAPS YOU SHOULD REMOVE YOUR MASK? HOW WILL YOU EAT?

I DO NOT EAT IN COMPANY. MY FACE IS SCARRED.

THE WOUNDS OF MANY BATTLES.

AND YOUR OPPONENTS? THE MEN WHO INFLICTED THE SCARS.



I HAVE TAKEN AN OATH THAT NO ONE WHO INJURES ME WILL LIVE TO BOAST OF IT.

WE THINK ALIKE MY FRIEND, THERE IS NO ROOM FOR MERCY IN THE HEARTS OF GREAT MEN. NO ROOM FOR SENTIMENT.

WE MUST BE AS HARD AND COLD AS STEEL.

I AGREE.

SHEATH YOUR SWORD!

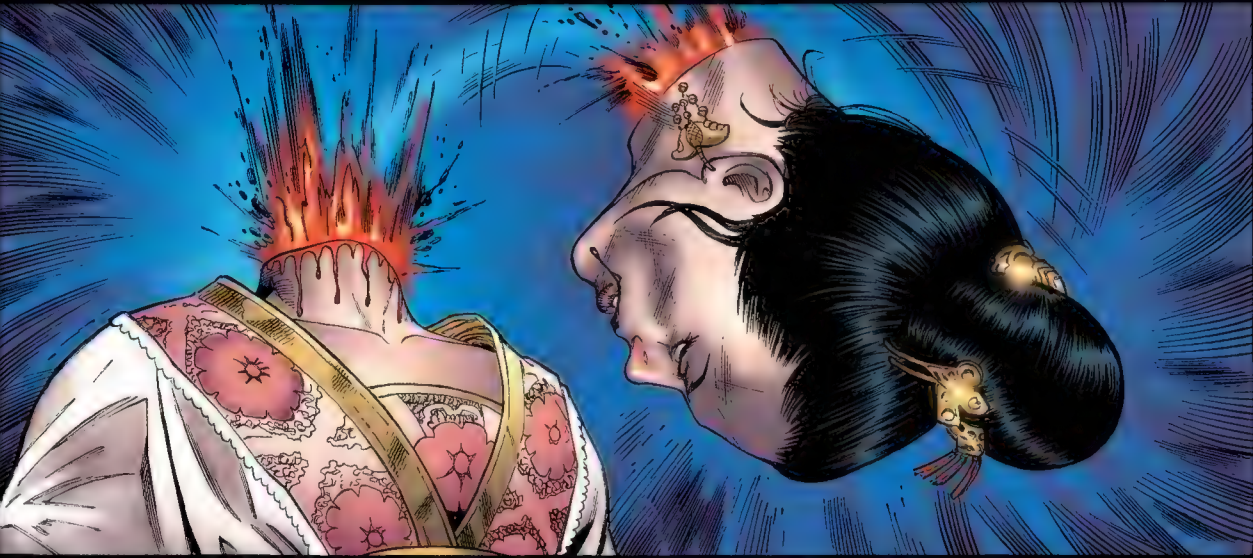
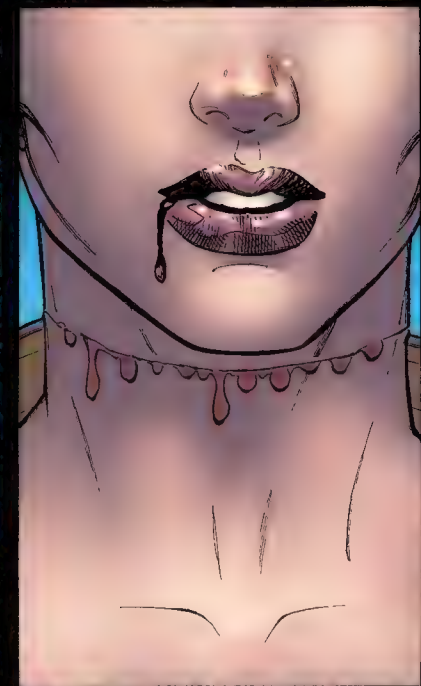
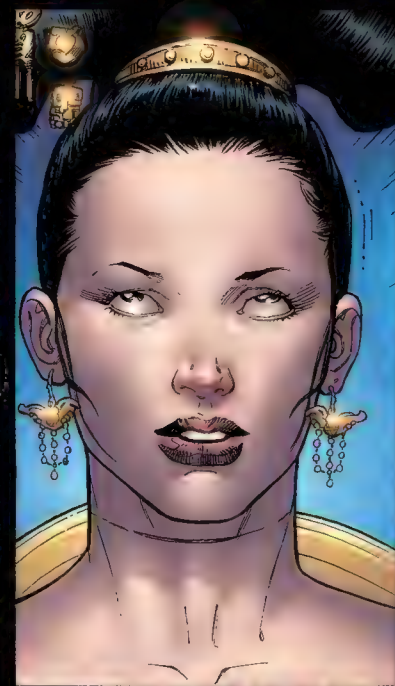
I COULD HAVE WARNED THEM BUT I DID NOT HAVE THE WILL. MY TONGUE FELT AS IF IT HAD TURNED TO WOOD IN MY MOUTH.



NONSENSE! I'M SURE OUR FRIEND DOES NOT INTEND TO USE IT ON ME.

I WANT TO SHOW YOU SOMETHING.

A DEMONSTRATION OF YOUR PHILOSOPHY.



REMEMBERED
THE NIGHT WHEN
SHIHONG VISITED
THE CREATURE.
THE NIGHT I
PRAYED TO THE
GODS TO BRING
DOWN A JUST
PUNISHMENT...

WHAT-?

...UPON
HER
PERFECT
HEAD...


SHIHONG!

N-N-O-O-O-

WHO
ARE
YOU?

A MAN,
GOVERNOR
ZHENG.

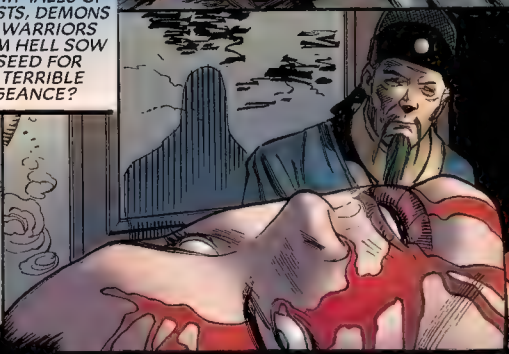
A MAN
WITHOUT
MERCY.



THE STRANGER
HAD PROMISED THE
CREATURE THAT
HE WOULD FULFILL
HIS DREAMS.


WHAT
DREAMS
THEY MUST
HAVE BEEN!

DID MY TALES OF
GHOSTS, DEMONS
AND WARRIORS
FROM HELL SOW
THE SEED FOR
THIS TERRIBLE
VENGEANCE?






HE
SLEW
THEM
ALL.



HE TOOK HIS
REVENGE ON
EVERY HAND
THAT WAS
EVER RAISED
AGAINST HIM.




EVERY TONGUE
THAT CURSED HIM
OR SPAT ON HIM.
EVERY EYE THAT
ONCE CAST A LOOK
OF CONTEMPT ON
HIS TWISTED BODY.



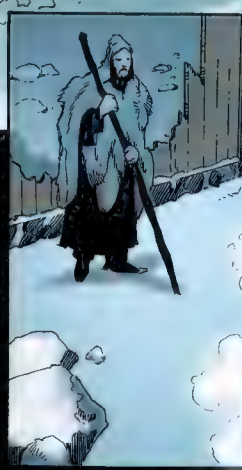
OF ALL THE
MEN AND
WOMEN IN
THE PALACE,
I ALONE
WAS SPARED.






MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE THAT BLOODY NIGHT. THE PALACE DECAYS DAY BY DAY AND IT IS MOSTLY IN RUINS, EXCEPT FOR THE FEW ROOMS I OCCUPY.

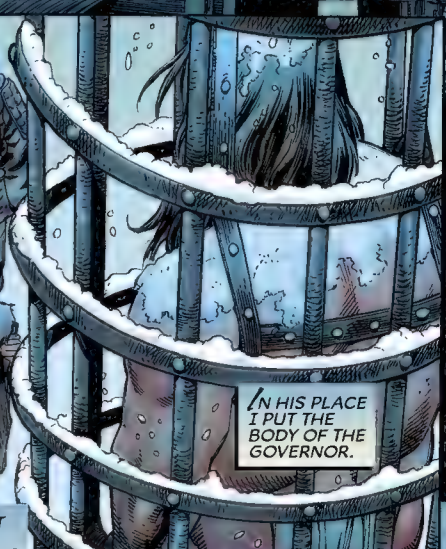
I AM OLD NOW AND MY OWN DEATH APPROACHES, BUT STILL I TELL MY TALE TO THOSE WHO MAKE THE JOURNEY TO HEAR IT.




WHAT THEY REALLY COME FOR, OF COURSE, IS TO SEE THE BODY.



I TOOK THE CREATURE, WHOSE MOTHER NAMED HIM CHENGLEI, OUT OF THE CAGE AND BURIED HIM.




IN HIS PLACE I PUT THE BODY OF THE GOVERNOR.



THERE WAS NO MARK UPON HIM. IT WAS NOT THE WARRIOR'S SWORD THAT KILLED HIM.

PERHAPS IT WAS FEAR ALONE.



IT IS A GREAT CURIOSITY. ALL THE YEARS THE BODY HAS HUNG HERE, IT HAS NEVER DETERIORATED. IT DOES NOT DECAY.

NO PREDATOR COMES TO FEED ON IT, NEITHER CARRION CROW NOR WORM, NOR MAGGOT.



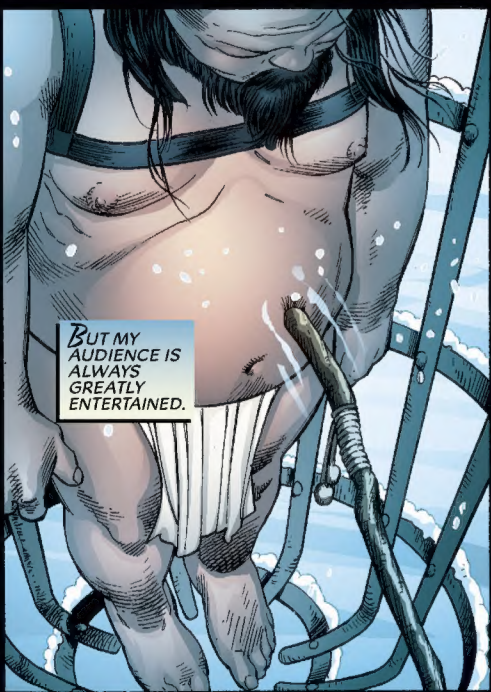
GOVERNOR
ZHENG!

LIVE WELL ENOUGH
FROM MY STORYTELLING
AND FOR A FEW EXTRA
COINS I WILL
DEMONSTRATE ONE
FURTHER MARVEL.

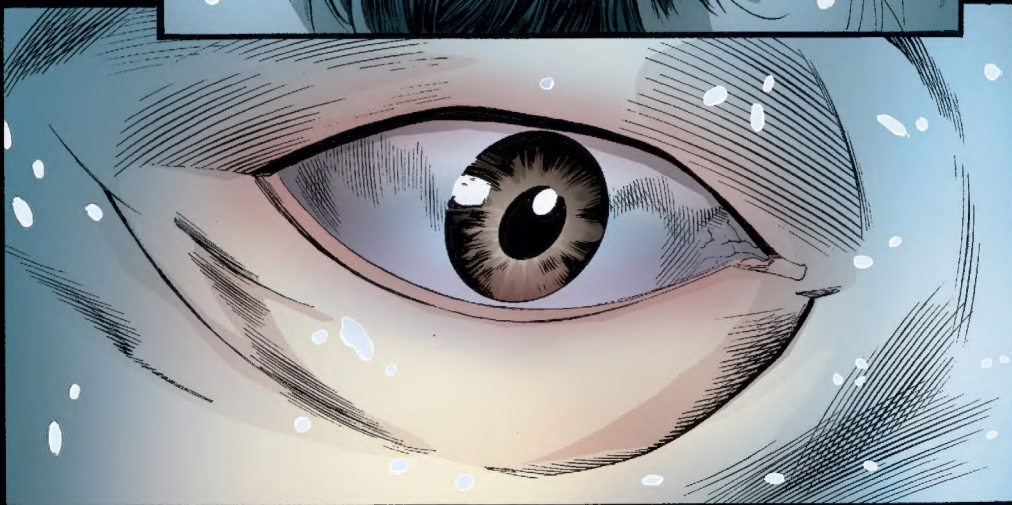
IT IS ONLY A REFLEX.
A TRICK OF NATURE. I
HAVE SEEN A SIMILAR
REACTION IN THE
SEVERED LEGS OF A
FROG OR IN A
BEHEADED CHICKEN.



YOU HAVE
VISITORS,
GOVERNOR!




BUT MY
AUDIENCE IS
ALWAYS
GREATLY
ENTERTAINED.





AND THE
CREATURE
WHO
BECAME A
WARRIOR?

IN MY DREAMS I
STILL SEE HIM
RIDING AWAY ALONE,
FROM THE SCENE OF
BLOODY SLAUGHTER.




BUT THERE ARE MANY WHO
SWEAR THEY SAW HIM THAT
NIGHT AT THE HEAD OF A
COLUMN OF HORSEMEN.



A BEAUTIFUL
WOMAN RODE
AT HIS HEEL.

THEY SAY A FIERY PORTAL
OPENED BEFORE THEM
AND THE WARRIOR LED
HIS FOLLOWERS INTO THE
MOUTH OF HELL.





ACCORDING TO
LEGEND, THE
WARRIOR RULES
HIS OWN CORNER
OF HELL WITH
HIS CONCUBINE
AT HIS SIDE...

...AND WHEN
THEY MAKE LOVE
HIS PASSION KNOWS
NO BOUNDS.





Tyrant
Lizard
King

EMPIRE